

GIRD YOURSELF FOR WORD GIRDERS

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Many of the articles in Word Ways were inspired by Dmitri Borgmann's Language on Vacation (Scribner's, 1965); this comprehensive volume of wordplay has stimulated almost every conceivable type of word surgery and dissection by faithful logophiles. One might, in fact, presume that the challenges mothered by this book have been well-nigh exhausted. Not so! On page 159, Dmitri introduced the concept of word girders: two words that are converted to two entirely different words by interchanging every second letter between the words. The following three five-letter examples given in his book should make the transformation perfectly clear:

TAPIR : TOPER
MOVES : MAVIS

MONAD : MINED
PILER : POLAR

CRONE : CLOSE
BLAST : BRANT

Note that these examples have an added property -- no letter is repeated. Dmitri challenged his readers to find six-letter or seven-letter word girders with this restriction.

To the best of my knowledge, no one has picked up the gauntlet. Abashed by this ten-year delay, I propose the following six-letter word girders, all taken from Webster's Unabridged:

CUTLAS : COTMAN
*BOGMEN : BUGLES

SUCLAT : SOCMAN
*BOGMEN : BUGLET

CURPIN : CARBID
*LAMBED : LUMPEN

Alas, the asterisked words are implied forms, not found in Webster in boldface type. This defect is corrected in the next three examples:

BADGER : BUDLET
SUNLIT : SANGIR

COLIES : CULMEN
TUBMAN : TOBIAS

METHOD : MATRON
CAPRIN : CEPHID

I'm firmly convinced that there is an acceptable seven-letter word girder. Do you have the heart to look for it? If you feel it looks easy, give it a try. Because of the proviso that no letter be duplicated you'll soon be immersed in cerebral contortions. Dmitri well knew what he was doing when he issued this challenge!